

THE
SERMONS
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SERMON I.

The Character of SHIMEI.

2 SAMUEL XIX. 21. 1st Part.

But Abisbai said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this?—

— **I**T has not a good aspect—
This is the second time *Abisbai* has proposed *Shimei's* destruction; once in the 16th chapter, on a sudden transport of indignation, when *Shimei* cursed David.—“*Why should this dead dog, cried Abisbai, curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and cut off his head.*”
— This had something at least of

gallantry in it; for in doing it, he hazarded his own; and besides the offender was not otherwise to be come at: the second time, is in the text; when the offender was absolutely in their power——when the blood was cool; and the suppliant was holding up his hands for mercy.

—Shall not Shimei, answered Abishai, be put to death for this? So unrelenting a pursuit looks less like justice than revenge, which is so cowardly a passion, that it renders Abishai's first instance almost inconsistent with the second. I shall not endeavour to reconcile them; but confine the discourse simply to Shimei; and make such reflections upon his character as may be of use to society.

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Upon the news of his son Absalom's conspiracy, David had fled from Jerusalem, and from his own house, for safety; the representation given of the manner of it, is truly affecting:— never was a scene of sorrow so full of distress!

The king fled with all his household to save himself from the sword of the man he loved: he fled with all the marks of humble sorrow—" *with his head cover'd and barefoot;*" and as he went by the ascent of mount Olivet, the sacred historian says he wept—some glad some scenes, perhaps, which there had pass'd —some hours of festivity he had shared with Absalom in better days, pressed tenderly upon nature,—he wept at this sad vicissitude of things:

—and all the people that were with him, smitten with his affliction, *cover'd each man his head—weeping as he went up.*

It was on this occasion, when David had got to Bahurim, that Shimei the son of Gera, as we read in the 5th verse, came out:—was it with the choicest oils he could gather from mount Olivet, to pour into his wounds?—Times and troubles had not done enough; and thou camest out, Shimei, to add thy portion——

“ And as he came, he cursed David, and threw stones and cast dust at him; and thus said Shimei, when he cursed: Go to, thou man of Belial—thou hast sought blood,—and behold thou art caught in thy own mischief; for now hath the

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Lord returned upon thee all the blood of Saul and his house."

There is no small degree of malicious craft in fixing upon a season to give a mark of enmity and ill-will: a word,—a look, which at one time would make no impression—at another time wounds the heart; and like a shaft flying with the wind, pierces deep, which, with its own natural force, would scarce have reached the object aimed at.

This seemed to have been Shimei's hopes: but excess of malice makes men too quicksighted even for their own purpose. Could Shimei possibly have waited for the ebb of David's passions, and till the first great conflict within him had been over—then

the reproach of being guilty of Saul's blood must have hurt him—his heart was possessed with other feelings—it bled for the deadly sting which Absalom had given him—he felt not the indignity of a stranger—“*Behold my son Absalom, who came out of my bowels, seeketh my life—how much more may Shimei do it?—let him alone; it may be the Lord may look upon my affliction, and requite me good for this evil.*”

An injury unanswered in course grows weary of itself, and dies away in a voluntary remorse.

In bad dispositions capable of no restraint but fear—it has a different effect—the silent digestion of one wrong provokes a second.—He pursues him with the same invective; *and as David and his men went by the*

SERMON I. 7

way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him; and cursed as he went, and cast dust at him.

The insolence of base minds in success is boundless; and would scarce admit of a comparison, did not they themselves furnish us with one in the degrees of their abjection when evil returns upon them—the same poor heart which excites ungenerous tempers to triumph over a fallen adversary, in some instances seems to exalt them above the point of courage, sinks them in others even below cowardice. —Not unlike some little particles of matter struck off from the surface of the dirt by sunshine—dance and sport there whilst it lasts—but the moment 'tis withdrawn—they fall down—for dust they are—

and unto dust they will return—— whilst firmer and larger bodies preserve the stations which nature has assigned them, subjected to laws which no change of weather can alter.

This last did not seem to be Shimei's case; in all David's prosperity, there is no mention made of him—he thrust himself forward into the circle, and possibly was number'd amongst friends and well-wishers.

When the scene changes, and David's troubles force him to leave his house in despair—Shimei is the first man we hear of, who comes out against him.

The wheel turns round once more; Absalom is cast down, and David returns in peace—Shimei suits his behaviour to the occasion, and is the first

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man also who hastes to greet him——
and had the wheel turn'd round a hundred times, Shimei, I dare say, in every period of its rotation, would have been uppermost.

O Shimei! would to heaven when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee; and not one of thy resemblance left! but ye have multiplied exceedingly and replenished the earth; and if I prophecy rightly—— ye will in the end *subdue* it.

There is not a character in the world which has so bad an influence upon the affairs of it, as this of Shimei; whilst power meets with honest checks, and the evils of life with honest refuge, the world will never be undone: but thou, Shimei, hast sapp'd it at both

extremes; for thou corruptest prosperity—and 'tis thou who hast broken the heart of poverty; and so long as worthless spirits can be ambitious ones, 'tis a character we shall never want. O! it infests the court—the camp—the cabinet—it infests the church—go where you will—in every quarter, in every profession, you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay.—

—Haste, Shimei!—haste; or thou wilt be undone for ever—Shimei girdeth up his loins and speedeth after him—behold the hand which governs every thing,—takes the wheels from off his chariot, so that he who driveth, driveth on heavily—Shimei doubles his speed—but 'tis the contrary way;

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he flies like the wind over a sandy desert, and the place thereof shall know it no more——flay, Shimei! 'tis your patron——your friend——your benefactor;—'tis the man who has raised you from the dunghill——'tis all one to Shimei: Shimei is the barometer of every man's fortune; marks the rise and fall of it, with all the variations from scorching hot to freezing cold upon his countenance, that the simile will admit of.——Is a cloud upon thy affairs?—see—it hangs over Shimei's brow——Hast *thou been* spoken for to the king or the captain of the host without success?——look not into the court-kalender——the vacancy is fill'd up in Shimei's face—Art thou in debt?—though not to Shimei—no matter

——the worst officer of the law shall not be more insolent.

What then, Shimei, is the guilt of poverty so black—is it of so general a concern, that thou and all thy family must rise up as one man to reproach it?——when it lost every thing—did it lose the right to pity too? or did he who maketh poor as well as maketh rich, strip it of its natural powers to mollify the hearts and supple the temper of your race?—Trust me, ye have much to answer for; it is this treatment which it has ever met with from spirits like yours, which has gradually taught the world to look upon it as the greatest of evils, and shun it as the worst disgrace——and what is it, I beseech you ——what is it that man

will not do, to keep clear of so sore an imputation and punishment?—is it not to fly from this, that *he rises early—late takes rest; and eats the bread of carefulness?*—that he plots, contrives—swears—lies—shuffles—puts on all shapes—tries all garments—wears them, with this, or that side outward—just as it favours his escape.

They who have considered our nature, affirm, that shame and disgrace are two of the most insupportable evils of human life: the courage and spirits of many have mastered other misfortunes, and borne themselves up against them; but the wisest and best of souls have not been a match for these; and we have many a tragical instance on

record, what greater evils have been run into, merely to avoid this one.

Without this tax of infamy, poverty, with all the burdens it lays upon our flesh—so long as it is virtuous, could never break the spirits of a man; all its hunger, and pain, and nakedness, are nothing to it, they have some counterpoise of good; and besides they are directed by providence, and must be submitted to: but those are afflictions not from the hand of God or nature—
“*for they do come forth of the DUST and most properly may be said to spring out of the GROUND, and this is the reason they lay such stress upon our patience,—and in the end, create such a distrust of the world, as makes us look up—and pray, Let me fall into*

thy hands, O God! but let me not fall into the hands of men."

Agreeable to this was the advice of Eliphaz to Job in the day of his distress;—"acquaint thyself, said he, now with God:"—indeed his poverty seemed to have left him no other: the swords of the Sabeans had frightened them away—all but a few friends; and of what kind they were, the very proverb, of *Job's* comforters—says enough.

It is an instance which gives one great concern for human nature, "That a man, who always wept for him who was in trouble;—who never saw any perish for want of clothing;—who never suffered the stranger to lodge in the street, but opened his door to the travel-

ler;—*that a man of so good a character,—“that he never caused the eyes of the widow to fail,—or had eaten his morsel by himself alone, and the fatherless had not eaten thereof;”*—that such a man, the moment he fell into poverty, should have occasion to cry out for quarter,—*Have mercy upon me, O my friends! for the hand of God has touched me.*—Gentleness and humanity (one would think) would melt the hardest heart and charm the fiercest spirit; bind up the most violent hand, and still the most abusive tongue:—but the experiment failed in a stronger instance of him, whose meat and drink it was to do us good; and in pursuit of which, whose whole life was a continued scene of kindness and of insults,

for which we must go back to the same explanation with which we set out,—and that is, the scandal of poverty.——

“*This fellow, we know not whence he is*”——was the popular cry of one part; and with those who seemed to know better, the quere did not lessen the disgrace:—Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?—of Mary;—great God of Israel! What!—of the meanest of thy people! (*for he had not regarded the low estate of his handmaiden*)—and of the poorest! too (*for she had not a lamb to offer, but was purified as Moses directed in such a case, by the oblation of a turtle dove.*)——

That the SAVIOUR of their nation could be poor, and not have where to

lay his head,—was a crime never to be forgiven: and though the Purity of his doctrine, and the works which he had done in its support, were stronger arguments on its side, than his humiliation could be against it,—yet the offence still remained;—they looked for the redemption of Israel; but they would have it only in those dreams of power which filled their imagination.—

Ye who weigh the worth of all things only in the goldsmith's balance!—was this religion for you?—a religion whose appearance was not great and splendid,—but looked thin and meagre, and whose principles and promises shewed more like the curses of the law, than its blessings:—for

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they called for sufferings, and promised little but persecutions.

In truth it is not easy for tribulation or distress, for nakedness or famine, to make many converts out of pride; or reconcile a worldly heart to the scorn and reproaches, which were sure to be the portion of every one who believed a mystery so discredited by the world, and so unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures.

But to bring this sermon to its proper conclusion.

If *Astrea* or Justice never finally took her leave of the world, till the day that poverty first became ridiculous, it is matter of consolation, that the God of Justice is ever over us;—that whatever outrages the lowness of

our condition may be exposed to, from a mean and undiscerning world,—— that we walk in the presence of the greatest and most generous of Beings, who is infinitely removed from cruelty and straitness of mind, and all those little and illiberal passions, with which we hourly insult each other.

The worst part of mankind are not always to be conquered—but if they are——’tis by the imitation of these qualities which must do it:—’tis true—as I’ve shewn——they may fail; but still all is not lost,——for if we conquer not the world——in the very attempts to do it, we shall at least conquer ourselves, and lay the foundation of our peace (where it ought to be) within our own hearts.

SERMON II.

The Case of Hezekiah and the Messengers.

[Preached before his Excellency the Earl of
HERTFORD, at Paris, 1763.]

2 KINGS XX. 15.

*And he said, What have they seen in thine
house? and Hezekiah answered, All
the things that are in my house have
they seen; there is nothing amongst
all my treasures that I have not shewn
them.*

— **A**ND where was the harm,
you'll say, in all this?

“ An eastern prince, the son of Ba-
ladine, had sent messengers with pre-

sents as far as from Babylon, to congratulate Hezekiah upon the recovery from his sickness; and Hezekiah, who was a good prince, acted consistently with himself: *he received and entertained the men, and bearkened unto them,* and before he sent them away, he courteously shewed them all that was worth a stranger's curiosity in his house and his kingdom,—and in this, seemed only to have discharged himself of what urbanity or the *etiquette* of courts might require. Notwithstanding this, in the verse which immediately follows the text, we find he had done amiss; and as a punishment for it, that all his riches, which his forefathers had laid up in store unto that day, were threatened to be

carried away in triumph to Babylon,
——the very place from whence the
messengers had come.

A hard return ! and what his behaviour does not seem to have deserved. To set this matter in a clear light, it will be necessary to enlarge upon the whole story,——the reflections which will arise out of it, as we go along, may help us——at least, I hope they will be of use on their own account.

After the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians, we read in the beginning of this chapter, that Hezekiah was sick even unto death; and that God sends the prophet Isaiah, with the unwelcome message, *that he should set his house in order, for that he should die, and not live.*

There are many instances of men, who have received such news with the greatest ease of mind, and even entertained the thoughts of it with smiles upon their countenances,—and this, either from strength of spirits and the natural cheerfulness of their temper,—or that they knew the world,—and cared not for it,——or expected a better——yet thousands of good men, with all the helps of philosophy, and against all the assurances of a well-spent life, that the change must be to their account,—upon the approach of death have still lean'd towards this world, and wanted spirits and resolution to bear the shock of a separation from it for ever.

This, in some measure, seemed to have been Hezekiah's case; for tho'

SERMON II. 25

he had walked before God in truth, and with a perfect heart, and had done that which was good in his sight,—— yet we find that the hasty summons afflicted him greatly;——that upon the delivery of the message he wept fore;——that he turned his face towards the wall,——perhaps for the greater secrecy of his devotion, and that, by withdrawing himself thus from all external objects, he might offer up his prayer unto his God, with greater and more fervent attention.

——And he pray'd, and said, O LORD! I beseech thee remember—— O Hezekiah! How couldst thou fear that God had forgotten thee? or, How couldst thou doubt of his remembrance of thy integrity, when

he call'd thee to receive its recompence?

But here it appears of what materials man is made: he pursues happiness—and yet is so content with misery, that he would wander for ever in this dark vale of it,—and say, “*It is good, Lord! to be here, and to build tabernacles of rest;*” and so long as we are clothed with flesh, and nature has so great a share within us, it is no wonder if that part claims its right, and pleads for the sweetness of life, notwithstanding all its care and disappointments.

This natural weakness, no doubt, had its weight in Hezekiah's earnest prayer for life: and yet from the success it met with, and the immediate

change of God's purpose thereupon, it is hard to imagine, but that it must have been accompanied with some meritorious and more generous motive; and if we suppose, as some have done, that he turned his face towards the wall, because that part of his chamber looked towards the temple, the care of whose preservation lay next his heart, we may consistently enough give this sense to his prayer.

“ O God remember how I have
“ walked before thee in truth;—
“ how much I have done to rescue
“ thy religion from error and false-
“ hood;—thou knowest that the
“ eyes of the world are fixed upon me,
“ as one that hath forsaken their ido-
“ latry, and restored thy worship;—

“ that I stand in the midst of a crooked
“ and corrupt generation, which looks
“ thro’ all my actions, and watches
“ all events which happen to me: if
“ now they shall see me snatched
“ away in the midst of my days and
“ service, How will thy great name
“ suffer in my extinction? Will not
“ the heathen say, This it is to serve
“ the God of Israel!——How faith-
“ fully did Hezekiah walk before
“ him?—What enemies did he bring
“ upon himself, in too warmly pro-
“ moting his worship? and now when
“ the hour of sickness and distress
“ came upon him, and he most wanted
“ the aid of his God:—behold how
“ he was forsaken!”

S E R M O N H. 29

It is not unreasonable to ascribe some such pious and more disinterested motive to Hezekiah's desire of life, from the issue and success of his prayer: — *for it came to pass, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again and tell Hezekiah I have heard his prayer, I have seen his tears; and behold I will heal him.*

It was upon this occasion, as we read in the 12th verse of this chapter, that Baradock-baladan, son of Baladine king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: he had heard the fame of his sickness and recovery; for as the Chaldeans were great searchers into the secrets of nature, especially

into the motions of the celestial bodies, in all probability they had taken notice, at that distance, of the strange appearance of the shadow's returning ten degrees backwards upon their dials, and had inquired and learned upon what account, and in whose favour such a sign was given; so that this astronomical miracle, besides the political motive which it would suggest of courting such a favourite of heaven, had been sufficient by itself to have led a curious people as far as Jerufalem, that they might see the man for whose sake the sun had forsook his course.

And here we see how hard it is to stand the shock of prosperity,—and

SERMON II. 53

how much truer a proof we give of our strength in that extreme of life, than in the other.

In all the trials of adversity, we find that Hezekiah behaved well,—nothing unmanned him: when besieged by the Assyrian host, which shut him up in Jerusalem, and threatened his destruction,—he stood unshaken, and depended upon God's succour.—When cast down upon his bed of sickness, and threaten'd with death, he meekly turn'd his face towards the wall,—wept and pray'd, and depended upon God's mercy:—but no sooner does prosperity return upon him, and the messengers from a far country come to pay the flattering homage due to his greatness, and the

extraordinary felicity of his life, but he turns giddy, and sinks under the weight of his good fortune, and with a transport unbecoming a wise man upon it,—'tis said, he hearken'd unto the men, and shew'd them all the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold, the spices and the precious ointments, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures; that there was nothing in his house, nor in his dominions, that Hezekiah shew'd them not: for tho' it is not expressly said here, (tho' it is in the parallel passage in Chronicles)—nor is he charged by the prophet that he did this out of vanity and a weak transport of ostentation;—yet as we are sure God could not be offended

but where there was a real crime, we might reasonably conclude that this was his, and that he who searches into the heart of man, beheld that his was corrupted with the blessings he had given him, and that it was just to make what was the occasion of his pride; become the instrument of his punishment, by decreeing, that all the riches he had laid up in store until that day, should be carried away in triumph to Babylon, the very place from whence the messengers had come who had been eye-witnesses of his folly.

“ O Hezekiah ! How couldst thou
 “ provoke God to bring this judg-
 “ ment upon thee ? How could thy

“ Spirit, all-meeke and gentle as it was,
“ have ever fallen into this snare?
“ Were thy treasures rich as the earth
“ —What! was thy heart so vain as
“ to be lifted up therewith? Was not
“ all that was valuable in the world—
“ nay, was not heaven itself almost
“ at thy command whilst thou wast
“ humble? and, How was it, that thou
“ couldst barter away all this, for
“ what was lighter than a bubble, and
“ desecrate an action so full of cour-
“ tesy and kindness as thine appeared
“ to be, by suffering it to take its
“ rise from so polluted a fountain?”

There is scarce any thing which the heart more unwillingly bears, than an analysis of this kind.

SERMON II. 35

We are a strange compound; and something foreign from what charity would suspect, so eternally twists itself into what we do, that not only in momentous concerns, where interest lifts under it all the powers of disguise,—but even in the most indifferent of our actions,—not worth a fallacy—by force of habit, we continue it: so that whatever a man is about,—observe him,—he stands arm'd inside and out with two motives; an ostensible one for the world,—and another which he reserves for his own private use;—this, you may say, the world has no concern with: it might have been so; but by obtruding the wrong motive upon the world, and stealing from it a character, instead of

winning one;——we give it a right, and a temptation along with it, to inquire into the affair.

The motives of the one for doing it, are often little better than the others for deserving it. Let us see if some social virtue may not be extracted from the errors of both the one and the other.

VANITY bids all her sons to be generous and brave,——and her daughters to be chaste and courteous.——But why do we want her instructions?——Ask the comedian who is taught a part he feels not——

Is it that the principles of religion want strength, or that the real passion for what is good and worthy will not carry us high enough——God! thou

knowest: they carry us too high——
we want not *to be*—but *to seem*—

Look out of your door,—take notice of that man: see what disquieting, intriguing, and shifting, he is content to go through, merely to be thought a man of plain-dealing:—three grains of honesty would save him all this trouble——alas! he has them not.——

Behold a second, under a show of piety hiding the impunities of a debauched life:——he is just entering the house of God:——would he was more pure—or less pious:—but then he could not gain his point.

Observe a third going on almost in the same track, with what an inflexible sanctity of deportment he suf-

tains himself as he advances:—every line in his face writes abstinence;—every stride looks like a check upon his desires: see, I beseech you, how he is cloak'd up with sermons, prayers, and sacraments; and so bemuffled with the externals of religion, that he has not a hand to spare for a worldly purpose;—he has armour at least—Why does he put it on? Is there no serving God without all this? Must the garb of religion be extended so wide to the danger of its rending?—Yes truly, or it will not hide the secret—and, What is that?

—That the saint has no religion at all.

—But where comes **GENEROSITY**; giving—not to a decayed artist—

but to the arts and sciences themselves.
—See,—he *builds not a chamber in the wall apart for the prophet*; but whole schools and colleges for those who come after. LORD! how they will magnify his name!—'tis in capitals already; the first—the highest, in the gilded rent-roll of every hospital and asylum.—

—One honest tear shed in private over the unfortunate, is worth it all.

What a problematic set of creatures does simulation make us! Who would divine, that all that anxiety and concern, so visible in the airs of one half of that great assembly, should arise from nothing else, but that the other half of it may think them to be men of consequence, penetration, parts, and

conduct?—What a noise amongst the claimants about it? Behold *Humility*, out of mere pride,——and honesty, almost out of knavery:——*Chastity*, never once in harm's way,——and courage, like a Spanish soldier upon an Italian stage—a bladder full of wind.—

——Hark! that, the sound of that trumpet,——let not my soldier run, ——'tis some good Christian giving alms. O, PITY, thou gentlest of human passions! soft and tender are thy notes, and ill accord they with so loud an instrument.

Thus something jars, and will forever jar in these cases: imposture is all dissonance, let what matter soever of it undertake the part; let him harmonize and modulate it as he may,

SERMON II. 41

one tone will contradict another; and whilst we have ears to hear, we shall distinguish it: 'tis truth only which is consistent and ever in harmony with itself: it fits upon our lips, like the natural notes of some melodies, ready to drop out, whether we will or no; —it racks no invention to let ourselves alone, and needs fear no critick, to have the same excellency in the heart which appears in the action.

It is a pleasing allusion the scripture makes use of in calling us sometimes a house, and sometimes a temple, according to the more or less exalted qualities of the spiritual guest which is lodged within us: whether this is the precise ground of the distinction, I will not affirm; but thus much may be

said, that, if we are to be temples, 'tis truth and singleness of heart which must make the dedication: 'tis this which must first distinguish them from the unhallowed pile, where dirty tricks and impositions are practised by the host upon the traveller, who carries but for a moment, and returns not again.

We all take notice, how close and reserved people are; but we do not take notice, at the same time, that every one may have something to conceal, as well as ourselves; and that we are only marking the distances, and taking the measures of self defence from each other, in the very instances we complain of: this is so true, that there is scarce any character so rare, as a man of real open and generous

integrity,——who carries his heart in his hand,——who says the thing he thinks, and does the thing he pretends. Tho' no one can dislike the character,—yet, Discretion generally shakes her head,—and the world soon lets him into the reason.

“ *O that I had in the wilderness a
“ lodging of wayfaring men! that I
“ might leave such a people, and go
“ from them.*” Where is the man of a nice sense of truth and strong feelings, from whom the duplicity of the world has not at one time or other wrung the same wish; and where lies the wilderness to which some one has not fled, from the same melancholy impulse?

Thus much for those who give occasion to be thought ill of;——let us

say a word or two unto those who take it.

But to avoid all common-place cant as much as I can on this head,——I will forbear to say, because I do not think it,——that 'tis a breach of Christian charity to think or speak evil of our neighbour, &c.

——We cannot avoid it: our opinions must follow the evidence; and we are perpetually in such engagements and situations, that 'tis our duties to speak what our opinions are—but God forbid that this ever should be done, but from its best motive—the sense of what is due to virtue, governed by discretion and the utmost fellow-feeling: were we to go on otherwise, beginning with the great broad

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cloak of hypocrisy, and so down through all its little trimmings and facings, tearing away without mercy all that look'd seemly,——we should leave but a tatter'd world of it.

But I confine what I have to say to a character less equivocal, and which takes up too much room in the world: it is that of those, who from a general distrust of all that looks disinterested, finding nothing to blame in an action, and perhaps much to admire in it,—immediately fall foul upon its motives: *Does Job serve God for nought?* What a vile insinuation! Besides, the question was not, whether Job was a rich man or a poor man?—but, whether he was a man of integrity or no? and the appearances

were strong on his side: indeed it might have been otherwise; it was possible Job might be sincere, and the devil took the advantage of the die for it.

It is a bad picture, and done by a terrible master, and yet we are always copying it. Does a man from real conviction of heart forsake his vices? — the position is not to be allowed, — no; his vices have forsaken him.

Does a pure virgin fear God and say her prayers: — she is in her climacterick.

Does humanity cloath and educate the unknown orphan? — Poverty! thou hast no genealogies: — See! is he not the father of the child? Thus do we rob heroes of the best part of

SERMON II. 47

their glory—their virtue. Take away the motive of the act, you take away all that is worth having in it;—wrest it to ungenerous ends, you load the virtuous man who did it with infamy;—undo it all—I beseech you: give him back his honour,—restore the jewel you have taken from him—replace him in the eye of the world—
——it is too late.

It is painful to utter the reproaches which should come in here.—I will trust them with yourselves: in coming from that quarter, they will more naturally produce such fruits as will not set your teeth on edge—for they will be the fruits of love and goodwill, to the praise of God and the happiness of the world, which I wish.

their glory—
 the honour of the act, you take away
 all that is left behind it—
 it is no longer ends, you lead the
 virtuous man who did it with him—
 my—
 give him back his honour—
 the reward have taken from him—
 let him have the eye of the world—
 it is a great thing to have the reputation
 which should come to him—
 that shall be his reward—
 from that point, they will not be
 truly good—
 for your tears on edge—
 will be the fruit of love and good-
 will, to the praise of God and man—
 think of the world, which is the

SERMON III.

The LEVITE and his CONCUBINE.

JUDGES XIX. 1, 2, 3.

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took unto him a concubine.

—A CONCUBINE!—but the text accounts for it, for in those days there was no king in Israel, and the Levite, you will say, like every other man in it, did what was right in his own eyes,—and so, you may add, did his concubine too—

*for she played the whore against him,
and went away.——*

——Then shame and grief go with her, and wherever she seeks a shelter, may the hand of justice shut the door against her.——

Not so; for she went unto her father's house in Bethlehem-judah, and was with him four whole months.

——Blessed interval for meditation upon the fickleness and vanity of this world and its pleasures! I see the holy man upon his knees,——with hands compressed to his bosom, and with uplifted eyes, thanking heaven, that the object which had so long shared his affections, was fled.——

The text gives a different picture of his situation; *for he arose and went*

after her to speak friendly to her, and to bring her back again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses; and she brought him unto her father's house; and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.—

—A most sentimental group! you'll say: and so it is, my good commentator, the world talks of every thing: give but the outlines of a story,—let *Spleen* or *Prudery* snatch the pencil, and they will finish it with so many hard strokes, and with so dirty a colouring, that *Candour* and *Courtesy* will sit in torture as they look at it.—Gentle and virtuous spirits! ye who know not what it is to be rigid interpreters, but of your own failings,—to you I address myself, the un-

hired advocates for the conduct of the misguided,——Whence is it, that the world is not more jealous of your office? How often must ye repeat it, “That such a one’s doing so or so”—is not sufficient evidence by itself to overthrow the accused? That our actions stand surrounded with a thousand circumstances which do not present themselves at first sight;—that the first springs and motives which impell’d the unfortunate, lie deeper still;——and, that of the millions which every hour are arraign’d, thousands of them may have err’d merely from the *head*, and been actually outwitted into evil; and even when from the heart,——that the difficulties and temptations under which they acted,

——the force of the passions,——the
suitableness of the object, and the
many struggles of virtue before she
fell,——may be so many appeals
from justice to the judgement-seat of
pity.

Here then let us stop a moment,
and give the story of the Levite and
his Concubine a second hearing: like
all others, much of it depends upon
the telling; and as the Scripture has
left us no kind of comment upon it,
'tis a story on which the heart cannot
be at a loss for what to say, or the
imagination for what to suppose——
the danger is, humanity may say too
much.

*And it came to pass in those days,
when there was no king in Israel, that*

a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, took unto himself a Concubine.——

O Abraham, thou father of the faithful! if this was wrong,——Why didst thou set so ensnaring an example before the eyes of thy descendants? and, Why did the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and Jacob, bless so often the seed of such intercourses, and promise to multiply and make princes come out of them?

God can dispense with his own laws; and accordingly we find the holiest of the patriarchs, and others in Scripture whose hearts cleaved most unto God, accommodating themselves as well as they could to the dispensation: that Abraham had Hagar;—

that Jacob, besides his two wives, Rachael and Leah, took also unto him Zilpah and Bilhah, from whom many of the tribes descended:—that David had seven wives and ten concubines;—Rehoboam, sixty;—and that, in whatever cases it became reproachable, it seemed not so much the thing itself, as the abuse of it, which made it so: this was remarkable in that of Solomon, whose excess became an insult upon the privileges of mankind; for by the same plan of luxury, which made it necessary to have forty thousand stalls of horses,—he had unfortunately miscalculated his other wants, and so had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines.

Wife——deluded man! was it not that thou madest some amends for thy bad practice, by thy good preaching, what had become of thee!——three hundred——but let us turn aside, I beseech you, from so sad a stumbling-block.

The Levite had but one. The Hebrew word imports a woman a concubine, or a wife a concubine, to distinguish her from the more infamous species, who came under the roofs of the licentious without principle. Our annotators tell us, that in Jewish *æconomicks*, these differ'd little from the wife, except in some outward ceremonies and stipulations, but agreed with her in all the true essences of marriage, and gave themselves up

to the husband, (for so he is call'd)
with faith plighted, with sentiments,
and with affection.

Such a one the Levite wanted to
share his solitude, and fill up that
uncomfortable blank in the heart in
such a situation; for notwithstanding
all we meet with in books, in many
of which, no doubt, there are a good
many handsome things said upon the
sweets of retirement, &c. . . . yet still
"it is not good for man to be alone:"
nor can all which the cold-hearted pe-
dant stuns our ears with upon the
subject, ever give one answer of satis-
faction to the mind; in the midst of
the loudest vauntings of philosophy,
Nature will have her yearnings for so-
ciety and friendship;—a good heart

wants some object to be kind to——
and the best parts of our blood, and
the purest of our spirits, suffer most
under the destitution.

Let the torpid Monk seek heaven
comfortless and alone.——God speed
him! For my own part, I fear, I
should never so find the way: let me
be wise and religious——but let me
be MAN: wherever thy Providence
places me, or whatever be the road I
take to get to thee——give me some
companion in my journey, be it only
to remark to, How our shadows
lengthen as the sun goes down;——
to whom I may say, How fresh is the
face of nature! How sweet the flowers
of the field! How delicious are these
fruits!

Alas! with bitter herbs, like his passover, did the Levite eat them: for as they thus walked the path of life together,——she wantonly turn'd aside unto another, and fled from him.

It is the mild and quiet half of the world, who are generally outraged and borne down by the other half of it: but in this they have the advantage; whatever be the sense of their wrongs, that pride stands not so watchful a centinel over their forgiveness, as it does in the breasts of the fierce and froward: we should all of us, I believe, be more forgiving than we are, would the world but give us leave; but it is apt to interpose its ill offices in remissions, especially of this

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kind: the truth is, it has its laws, to which the heart is not always a party; and acts so like an unfeeling engine in all cases without distinction, that it requires all the firmness of the most settled humanity to bear up against it.

Many a bitter conflict would the Levite have to sustain with himself—his Concubine—and the sentiments of his tribe, upon the wrong done him:—much matter for pleading—and many an embarrassing account on all sides: in a period of four whole months, every passion would take its empire by turns; and in the ebbs and flows of the less unfriendly ones, PITY would find some moments to be heard—RELIGION herself would not be silent,—CHARITY would

SERMON III. 61

have much to say,—and thus attun'd,
every object he beheld on the borders
of mount Ephraim,——every grot
and grove he pass'd by, would solicit
the recollection of former kindness,
and awaken an advocate in her behalf,
more powerful than them all.

“ I grant——I grant it all,”—he
would cry,—“ ’tis foul ! ’tis faith-
“ less !——but, Why is the door of
“ mercy to be shut for ever against it ?
“ and, Why is it to be the only sad
“ crime that the injured may not re-
“ mit, or reason or imagination pass
“ over without a scar ?——Is it the
“ blackest ? In what catalogue of hu-
“ man offences is it so marked ? or,
“ Is it, that of all others ’tis a blow
“ most grievous to be endured ?——

“ the heart cries out, It is so : but let
“ me ask my own, What passions are
“ they which give edge and force to
“ this weapon which has struck me ?
“ and, Whether it is not my own
“ pride, as much as my virtues, which
“ at this moment excite the greatest
“ part of that intolerable anguish
“ in the wound which I am laying
“ to her charge ? But, merciful hea-
“ ven ! was it otherwise, why is an
“ unhappy creature of thine to be
“ persecuted by me with so much
“ cruel revenge and rancorous despite
“ as my first transport called for ?
“ Have faults no extenuations ?——
“ Makes it nothing, that when the
“ trespass was committed, she forsook
“ the partner of her guilt, and fled

SERMON III. 63

“ directly to her father’s house? And
 “ is there no difference betwixt one
 “ propensely going out of the road
 “ and continuing there, thro’ deprava-
 “ vity of will——and a hapless wan-
 “ derer straying by delusion, and wa-
 “ rily treading back her steps?——
 “ Sweet is the look of sorrow for an
 “ offence, in a heart determined ne-
 “ ver to commit it more!——Upon
 “ that altar only could I offer up my
 “ wrongs. Cruel is the punishment
 “ which an ingenuous mind will take
 “ upon itself, from the remorse of so
 “ hard a trespass against me,——and
 “ if that will not balance the account,
 “ ——just God! let me forgive the
 “ rest. Mercy well becomes the heart
 “ of all thy creatures,——but most
 “ of thy servant, a Levite, who of-

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“fers up so many daily sacrifices to
“thee, for the transgressions of thy
“people.—

—“But to little purpose, he would
“add, have I served at thy altar,
“where my business was to sue for
“mercy, had I not learn'd to prac-
“tise it.”

Peace and happiness rest upon the
head and heart of every man who can
thus think !

*So he arose, and went after her, to
speak friendly to her—in the original—
“to speak to her heart ;”——to ap-
ply to their former endearments,—and
to ask, How she could be so unkind
to him, and so very unkind to her-
self?——*

SERMON III. 65

—Even the upbraidings of the quiet and relenting are sweet: not like the strivings of the fierce and inexorable, who bite and devour all who have thwarted them in their way;—but they are calm and courteous, like the spirit which watches over their character: How could such a temper woo the damsel, and not bring her back? or, How could the father of the damsel, in such a scene, have a heart open to any impressions but those mentioned in the text;——
That when he saw him, he rejoiced to meet him;——urged his stay from day to day, with that most irresistible of all invitations,—“*Comfort thy heart, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry.*”

If *Mercy* and *Truth* thus met together in settling this account, *Love* would surely be of the party: great—great is its power in cementing what has been broken, and wiping out wrongs even from the memory itself: and so it was—for the Levite arose up, and with him his Concubine and his servant, and they departed.

It serves no purpose to pursue the story further; the catastrophe is horrid, and would lead us beyond the particular purpose for which I have enlarged upon thus much of it,—and that is, to discredit rash judgment, and illustrate from the manner of conducting this drama, the courtesy which the *dramatis personæ* of every other piece may have a right to. Al-

SERMON III. 67

most one half of our time is spent in telling and hearing evil of one another—some unfortunate knight is always upon the stage—and every hour brings forth something strange and terrible to fill up our discourse and our astonishment, “How people can be so foolish!”——and 'tis well if the compliment ends there; so that there is not a social virtue for which there is so constant a demand,—or, consequently, so well worth cultivating, as that which opposes this unfriendly current——many and rapid are the springs which feed it, and various and sudden, God knows, are the gusts which render it unsafe to us in this short passage of our life: let us make the discourse as serviceable as we can;

by tracing some of the most remarkable of them up to their source.

And, first, there is one miserable inlet to this evil, and which, by the way, if speculation is supposed to precede practice, may have been derived, for aught I know, from some of our busiest inquirers after nature,—and that is, when with more zeal than knowledge we account for phenomena, before we are sure of their existence.—

It is not the manner of the Romans to condemn any man to death, (much less to be martyr'd) said Festus ;—and doth our law judge any man before it bear him, and know what he doth ; cried Nicodemus ; and he that answereth, or determineth, a matter before he has heard it,——it is folly and a shame

SERMON III. 69

unto him.—We are generally in such a haste to make our own decrees, that we pass over the justice of these, — and then the scene is so changed by it, that 'tis our folly only which is real, and that of the accused, which is imaginary: through too much precipitancy it will happen so; and then the jest is spoil'd,—or we have criticised our own shadow.

A second way is, when the process goes on more orderly, and we begin with getting information, — but do it from those suspected evidences, against which our SAVIOUR warns us, when he bids us “*not to judge according to appearance:*” — in truth, 'tis behind these that most of the things which blind human judgment

he concealed,——and, on the contrary, there are many things which appear to be,——which are not:——
Christ came eating and drinking,——behold a wine-bibber!——he sat with sinners——he was their friend:——in many cases of which kind, *Truth*, like a modest matron, scorns art—and disdains to press herself forwards into the circle to be seen:——ground sufficient for *Suspicion* to draw up the libel,——for *Malice* to give the torture,——or rash *Judgment* to start up and pass a final sentence.

A third way is, when the facts which denote misconduct are less disputable, but are commented upon with an asperity of censure, which a humane or a gracious temper would

spare: an abhorrence against what is criminal, is so fair a plea for this, and looks so like virtue in the face, that in a sermon against rash judgment, it would be unseasonable to call it in question,——and yet, I declare, in the fullest torrent of exclamations which the guilty can deserve, that the simple apostrophè, “who made me to differ? why was not I an example?” would touch my heart more, and give me a better earnest of the commentators,——than the most corrosive period you could add. The punishment of the unhappy, I fear, is enough without it——and were it not,——’tis pitious, the tongue of a Christian, whose religion is all candour and courtesy, should be made the executioner. We

find in the discourse between Abraham and the rich man, tho' the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet still the patriarch treated him with mild language:—*Son!*—*Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime, &c. &c.*—and in the dispute about the body of Moses, between the Archangel and the devil, (himself,) St. Jude tells us, he durst not bring a railing accusation against him;—'twas unworthy his high character,——and, indeed, might have been impolitick too; for if he had, (as one of our divines notes upon the passage) the devil had been too hard for him at railing,——'twas his own weapon,——and the basest spirits, after his example, are the most expert at it.

SERMON III. 73

This leads me to the observation of a fourth cruel inlet to this evil, and that is, the desire of being thought men of wit and parts, and the vain expectation of coming honestly by the title, by shrewd and sarcastic reflections upon whatever is done in the world. This is setting up trade upon the broken stock of other people's failings,—perhaps their misfortunes:—so, much good may't do them with what honour they can get,—the furthest extent of which, I think, is, to be praised, as we do some fauces, with tears in our eyes: It is a commerce most illiberal: and as it requires no vast capital, too many embark in it, and so long as there are bad passions to be gratified,—and bad heads to judge,

with such it may pass for wit, or at least, like some vile relation, whom all the family is ashamed of, claim kindred with it, even in better companies. Whatever be the degree of its affinity, it has helped to give wit a bad name, as if the main essence of it was satire: certainly there is a difference between *Bitterness* and *Saltiness*,—that is,——between the malignity and the festivity of wit,——the one is a mere quickness of apprehension, void of humanity,—and is a talent of the devil; the other comes down from the Father of Spirits, so pure and abstracted from persons, that willingly it hurts no man; or if it touches upon an indecorum, 'tis with that dexterity of true genius, which enables him rather to

give a new colour to the absurdity, and let it pass.—He may smile at the shape of the obelisk raised to another's fame,——but the malignant wit will level it at once with the ground, and build his own upon the ruins of it.—

What then, ye rash censurers of the world! Have ye no mansions for your credit, but those from whence ye have extruded the right owners? Are there no regions for you to shine in, that ye descend for it into the low caverns of abuse and crimination? Have ye no seats——but those of the scornful to sit down in? If *Honour* has mistook his road, or the *Virtues*, in their excesses, have approached too near the confines of *Vices*, are they therefore

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to be cast down the precipice? Must **BEAUTY** for ever be trampled upon in the dirt for one——one false step? And shall no one virtue or good quality, out of the thousand the fair penitent may have left,——shall not one of them be suffered to stand by her?——Just God of Heaven and Earth!——

——But thou art merciful, loving, and righteous, and lookest down with pity upon these wrongs thy servants do unto each other: pardon us, we beseech thee, for them, and all our transgressions; let it not be remember'd, that we were brethren of the same flesh, the same feelings and infirmities.—O my God! write it not down in thy book, that thou madest

SERMON III. 77

us merciful after thy own image ;——
 that thou hast given us a religion so
 courteous,——so good temper'd,——
 that every precept of it carries a balm
 along with it to heal the foreness of
 our natures, and sweeten our spirits,
 that we might live with such kind in-
 tercourse in this world, as will fit us
 to exist together in a better.

the world is a stage,
 and we are but players
 in a play whose scene is life,
 whose audience is God.
 To live is to act, and to act
 is to be seen. In the world
 of men, we are judged by our
 deeds, and in the world
 of God, we are judged by our
 hearts.

And so, my friends,
 let us live our lives
 as if we were always
 in the presence of God.
 Let us be true to our
 consciences, and let us
 be faithful to our duties.
 For in the end, it is not
 what we have done, but
 what we have been, that
 will count.

SERMON IV.

FELIX's Behaviour towards PAUL,
examined.

ACTS xxiv. 26.

*He hoped also, that money should have
been given him of Paul, that he might
loose him.*

A NOBLE object to take up
the consideration of the Ro-
man governor!

——“ *He hoped, that money should
have been given him!*”——For what
end? to enable him to judge betwixt
right and wrong!——and, From
whence was it to be wrung? from
the poor scrip of a disciple of the
carpenter's son, who left nothing to

his followers but poverty and sufferings.——

And was this Felix!——the great, the noble Felix!——Felix the happy!——the gallant Felix, who kept Drufilla!——Could he do this?——base passion! What canst thou not make us do?

Let us consider the whole transaction.

Paul, in the beginning of this chapter, had been accused before Felix, by Tertullus, of very grievous crimes,——of being a pestilent fellow——a mover of seditions, and a profaner of the temple, &c.——To which accusations, the apostle having liberty from Felix to reply, he makes his defence from the 10th to the 22d

SERMON IV. 81

verse to this purport. He shews him, first, that the whole charge was destitute of all proof, which he openly challenges them to produce against him, if they had it;—that, on the contrary, he was so far from being the man Tertullus had represented, that the very principles of the religion with which he then stood charged,——and which they called Heresy, led him to be the most unexceptionable in his conduct, by the continual exercise which it demanded of him, of having a conscience void of offence at all times, both towards God and man; that consistently with this, his adversaries had neither found him in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people,

neither in the synagogue, or in the city,——for this he appeals to themselves:——that it was but twelve days since he came up to Jerusalem for to worship:——that, during that time, when he purified in the temple, he did it as became him, without noise, without tumult: this he calls upon the Jews who came from Asia, and were eye-witnesses of his behaviour, to attest;——and, in a word, he urges the whole defence before Felix in so strong a manner, and with such plain and natural arguments of his innocence, as to leave no colour for his adversaries to reply.

There was, however, still one adversary in this court,——tho' silent, yet not satisfied.——

—Spare thy eloquence, Tertullus! roll up the charge: a more notable orator than thyself is risen up,—’tis **AVARICE**, and that too in the most fatal place for the prisoner it could have taken possession of,—’tis in the heart of the man who judges him.

If Felix believed Paul innocent, and acted accordingly,—(that is) released him without reward,—this subtile advocate told him he would lose one of the profits of his employment—and if he acknowledged the faith of **CHRIST**, which Paul occasionally explained in his defence,—it told him, he might lose the employment itself; —so that notwithstanding the character of the apostle appeared (as it was) most spotless, and the faith he

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professed so very clear, that as he urged it, the heart gave its consent, —yet, at the same time, the passions rebell'd, and so strong an interest was formed thereby, against the first impressions in favour of the man and his cause, that both were dismissed; —the one to a more convenient hearing, which never came; the other to the hardships of a prison for two whole years, —hoping, as the text informs us, that money should have been given him; and even at the last, when he left the province, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, —that is, —to serve his interest in another shape, with all the conviction upon his mind, that he had done nothing worthy of bonds, he, nevertheless, left the holy man

SERMON IV. 85

bound, and consigned over to the hopeless prospect of ending his days in the same state of confinement, in which he had ungenerously left him.

One would imagine, as covetousness is a vice not naturally cruel in itself, that there must certainly have been a mixture of other motives in the governor's breast, to account for a proceeding so contrary to humanity and his own conviction; and could it be of use to raise conjectures upon it, there seems but too probable grounds for such a supposition. It seems that Drusilla, whose curiosity, upon a double account, had led her to hear Paul,—(for she was a daughter of Abraham——as well as of Eve)——was a character which might have figured very well even in our own times; for, as

Josephus tells us, she had left the Jew her husband, and without any pretence in their law to justify a divorce, had given herself up without ceremony to Felix; for which cause, though she is here called his wife, she was, in reason and justice, the wife of another man,—and consequently lived in an open state of adultery. So that when Paul, in explaining the faith of CHRIST, took occasion to argue upon the morality of the gospel,—and urged the eternal laws of justice,—the unchangeable obligations to temperance, of which chastity was a branch,—it was scarce possible to frame his discourse so, (had he wished to temporize) but that either her interest or her love must have taken offence:

SERMON IV. 87

and though we do not read, like Felix, that she trembled at the account, 'tis yet natural to imagine she was affected with other passions, of which the apostle might feel the effects —and 'twas well he suffered no more, if two such violent enemies as lust and avarice were combined against him.

But this by the way, —for as the text seems only to acknowledge one of these motives, it is not our business to assign the other.

It is observable, that this same apostle, speaking, in his epistle to Timothy, of the ill effects of this same ruling passion, affirms, that it is the root of all evil; and I make no doubt but the remembrance of his own sufferings had no small share in the se-

verity of the reflection.——Infinite are the examples, where the love of money is only a subordinate and ministerial passion, exercised for the support of some other vices; and 'tis generally found, when there is either ambition, prodigality, or lust, to be fed by it, that it then rages with the least mercy and discretion; in which cases, strictly speaking, it is not the root of other evils,—but other evils are the root of it.

This forces me to recal what I have said upon covetousness, as a vice not naturally cruel: it is not apt to represent itself to our imaginations, at first sight, under that idea; we consider it only as a mean, worthless turn of mind, incapable of judging or doing

SERMON IV. 89

what is right: but as it is a vice which does not always set up for itself,—to know truly what it is in this respect, we must know what masters it serves; —they are many, and of various casts and humours,—and each one lends it something of its own complexional tint and character.

This, I suppose, may be the cause that there is a greater and more whimsical mystery in the love of money, than in the darkest and most nonsensical problem that ever was pored on.

Even at the best, and when the passion seems to seek nothing more than its own amusement,—there is little—very little, I fear, to be said for its humanity.—It may be a sport to the miser,—but consider,

——it must be death and destruction to others——The moment this fordid humour begins to govern——farewell all honest and natural affection! farewell all he owes to parents, to children, to friends!——how fast the obligations vanish! see——he is now stripped of all feelings whatever:——the shrill cry of justice,——and the low lamentation of humble distress, are notes equally beyond his compass.——Eternal God! see!—he passes by one whom thou hast just bruised, without one pensive reflection:——he enters the cabin of the widow whose husband and child thou hast taken to thyself,——exact's his bond, without a sigh!—Heaven! if I am to be tempted,——let it be by

SERMON IV. 91

glory,——by ambition,——by some generous and manly vice:—if I must fall, let it be by some passion which thou hast planted in my nature which shall not harden my heart, but leave me room at last to retreat and come back to thee.

It would be easy here to add the common arguments which reason offers against this vice; but they are so well understood, both in matter and form,——it is needless.

I might cite to you what Seneca says upon it——but the misfortune is, that at the same time he was writing against riches, he was enjoying a great estate, and using every means to make that estate still greater.

With infinite pleasure might a preacher enrich his discourse in this

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place, by weaving into it all the smart things which ancient or modern wits have said upon the love of money: — he might inform you,

——“ That Poverty wants some-
“ thing——that covetousness want-
“ eth all.”

“ That a miser can only be said to
“ have riches, as a sick man has a
“ fever, which holds and tyrannizes
“ over the man,——not he over it.”

“ That covetousness is the shirt of
“ the soul,——the last vice it parts
“ with.”

“ That nature is content with few
“ things,——or that nature is never
“ satisfied at all, &c.”

The reflection of our SAVIOUR,
*That the life of man consisteth not in the
abundance of the things which he pos-*

SERMON IV. 93

Isaiah,——speaks more to the heart,——
and the single hint of the *Camel*, and
what a very narrow passage he has to
go,——has more coercion in it, than
all the seesaws of philosophy.

* I shall endeavour therefore to draw
such other reflections from this piece
of sacred history, as are applicable to
human life,——and more likely to be
of use.

There is nothing generally in which
our happiness and honour are more
nearly concerned, than in forming true
notions both of men and things; for
in proportion as we think rightly of
them, we approve ourselves to the
world,——and as we govern ourselves
by such judgments, so we secure our
peace and well-being in passing through

it: the false steps and miscarriages in life, issuing from a defect in this capital point, are so many and fatal, that there can be nothing more instructive than an inquiry into the causes of this perversion, which often appears so very gross in us, that were you to take a view of the world,—see what notions it entertains, and by what considerations it is governed,—you would say of the mistakes of human judgment, what the prophet does of the folly of human actions,—
“ *That we were wise to do evil, but*
“ *to judge rightly, had no understand-*
“ *ing.*”

That in many dark and abstracted questions of mere speculation, we should err—is not strange: we live

among mysteries and riddles, and almost every thing which comes in our way, in one light or other, may be said to baffle our understandings, ——yet seldom, so as to mistake in extremities, and take one contrary for another;—’tis very rare, for instance, that we take the virtue of a plant to be hot, when it is extremely cold,—or, that we try the experiment of opium to keep us waking:——yet, this we are continually attempting in the conduct of life, as well as in the great ends and measures of it. That such wrong determinations in us do not arise from any defect of judgment inevitably misleading us—would reflect dishonour upon God; as if he had made and sent men into the world

on purpose to play the fool. His all-bountiful hand made his judgment, like his heart, upright; and the instances of his sagacity, in other things, abundantly confirm it: we are led therefore in course to a supposition, that, in all inconsistent instances, there is a secret bias, some how or other, hung upon the mind, which turns it aside from reason and truth.

What this is, if we do not care to search for it in ourselves, we shall find it registered in this transaction of Felix: and we may depend that in all wrong judgments whatever, in such plain cases as this, that the same explanation must be given of it, which is given in the text,——namely, that it is some selfish consideration——

some secret dirty engagement with some little appetite, which does us so much dishonour.

The judgments of the more disinterested and impartial of us, receive no small tincture from our affections: we generally consult them in all doubtful points, and it happens well if the matter in question is not almost settled before the arbitrator is called into the debate;——but in the more flagrant instances, where the passions govern the whole man, 'tis melancholy to see the office to which reason, the great prerogative of his nature, is reduced; serving the lower appetites in the dishonest drudgery of finding out arguments to justify the present pursuit.

To judge rightly of our own worth, we should retire a little from the world, to see all its pleasures——and pains too, in their proper size and dimensions;——this, no doubt, was the reason, St. Paul, when he intended to convert Felix, began his discourse upon the day of judgment, on purpose to take the heart off from this world and its pleasures, which dishonour the understanding so as to turn the wisest of men into fools and children.

If you enlarge your observations upon this plan, you will find where the evil lies which has supported those desperate opinions, which have so long divided the Christian world——and are likely to divide it for ever.

SERMON IV. 99

Consider popery well; you will be convinced, that the truest definition which can be given of it, is,—That it is a pecuniary system, well contrived to operate upon men's passions and weakness, whilst their pockets are o'picking: run through all the points of difference between us,—and when you see, that in every one of them, they serve the same end which Felix had in view, either of money or power; there is little room left to doubt whence the cloud arises which is spread over the understanding.

If this reasoning is conclusive with regard to those who merely differ from us in religion,—let us try if it will not hold good with regard to those who have none at all,—or ra-

ther, who affect to treat all persuasions of it, with ridicule alike. Thanks to good sense, good manners, and a more enlarged knowledge, this humour is going down, and seems to be settling at present, chiefly amongst the inferior classes of people——where it is likely to rest: as for the lowest ranks, though they are apt enough to follow the modes of their betters, yet are not likely to be struck with this one, of making merry with that which is their consolation; they are too serious a set of poor people ever heartily to enter into it.—

There is enough, however, of it in the world to say, that this all-sacred system, which holds the world in harmony and peace, is too often the first

object that the giddy and inconsiderate make choice of to try the temper of their wits upon. Now, of the numbers who make this experiment,—do you believe that one in a thousand does it from conviction,—or from arguments which a course of study,—much cool reasoning,—and a sober inquiry into antiquity, and the true merits of the question, has furnished him with?—The years and way of life of the most forward of these, lead us to a different explanation.

Religion, which lays so many restraints upon us, is a troublesome companion to those who will lay no restraints upon themselves;—and for this reason there is nothing more

common to be observed, than that the little arguments and cavils, which such men have gathered up against it, in the early part of their lives,—how considerable soever they may have appeared, when viewed through their passions and prejudices, which give an unnatural turn to all objects,——yet, when the edge of appetite has been worn down, and the heat of the pursuit pretty well over,——and reason and judgment have got possession of their empire——

——They seldom fail of bringing the lost sheep back to his fold.

May God bring us all there. Amen.

SERMON V.

The PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 13.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all he had together, and took his journey into a far country.—

I KNOW not whether the remark is to our honour or otherwise, that lessons of wisdom have never such power over us, as when they are wrought into the heart, through the groundwork of a story which engages the passions: Is it that we are like iron, and must first be heated before we can be wrought upon? or, Is the heart so in love with deceit, that where a true report will not reach it, we must

cheat it with a fable, in order to come at truth?

Whether this parable of the prodigal (for so it is usually called)—is really such, or built upon some story known at that time in Jerusalem, is not much to the purpose; it is given us to enlarge upon, and turn to the best moral account we can.

“ A certain man, says our SAVIOUR,
“ had two sons, and the younger of
“ them said to his father, Give me
“ the portion of goods which falls
“ to me: and he divided unto them
“ his substance. And not many days
“ after, the younger son gathered all
“ together, and took his journey into
“ a far country, and there wasted his
“ substance with riotous living.”

The account is short: the interesting and pathetic passages with which such a transaction would be necessarily connected, are left to be supplied by the heart:——the story is silent——but nature is not:——much kind advice, and many a tender expostulation, would fall from the father's lips, no doubt, upon this occasion.

He would dissuade his son from the folly of so rash an enterprize, by shewing him the dangers of the journey, ——the inexperience of his age,——the hazards his life, his fortune, his virtue would run, without a guide, without a friend: he would tell him of the many snares and temptations which he had to avoid, or encounter at every step, ——the pleasures which

would solicit him in every luxurious court,—the little knowledge he could gain—except that of evil: he would speak of the seductions of women,—their charms——their poisons:—— what hapless indulgences he might give way to, when far from restraint, and the check of giving his father pain.

The dissuasive would but inflame his desire.——

He gathers all together.——

——I see the picture of his departure—the camels and asses laden with his substance, detached on one side of the piece, and already on their way:—— the prodigal son standing on the fore ground, with a forced sedateness, struggling against the flut-

tering movement of joy, upon his deliverance from restraint:—the elder brother holding his hand, as if unwilling to let it go:—the father, —sad moment! with a firm look, covering a prophetic sentiment, “that all would not go well with his child,” —approaching to embrace him, and bid him adieu.—Poor inconsiderate youth! From whose arms art thou flying? From what a shelter art thou going forth into the storm? Art thou weary of a father’s affection, of a father’s care? or, Hopest thou to find a warmer interest, a truer counsellor, or a kinder friend in a land of strangers, where youth is made a prey, and so many thousands are confederated to deceive them, and live by their spoils?

We will seek no farther than this idea, for the extravagancies by which the prodigal son added one unhappy example to the number: his fortune wasted——the followers of it fled in course,——the wants of nature remain,——the hand of God gone forth against him,——“*for when he had spent all, a mighty famine arose in that country.*”——Heaven! have pity upon the youth, for he is in hunger and distress——stray’d out of the reach of a parent, who counts every hour of his absence with anguish,——cut off from all his tender offices, by his folly,——and from relief and charity from others, by the calamity of the times.——

Nothing so powerfully calls home the mind as distress: the tense fibre then relaxes,——the soul retires to itself,——sits pensive and susceptible of right impressions: if we have a friend, 'tis then we think of him; if a benefactor, at that moment all his kindnesses press upon our mind.——Gracious and bountiful God! Is it not for this that they who in their prosperity forget thee, do yet remember and return to thee in the hour of their sorrow? When our heart is in heaviness, upon whom can we think but thee, who knowest our necessities afar off,—puttest all our tears in thy bottle,——seest every careful thought,—hearest every sigh and melancholy groan we utter.——

Strange!—that we should only begin to think of God with comfort,—when with joy and comfort we can think of nothing else.

Man surely is a compound of riddles and contradictions: by the law of his nature he avoids pain, and yet *unless he suffers in the flesh, he will not cease from sin*, though it is sure to bring pain and misery upon his head for ever.

Whilst all went pleasurable on with the prodigal, we hear not one word concerning his father——no pang of remorse for the sufferings in which he had left him, or resolution of returning, to make up the account of his folly: 'his first hour of distress seem'd

SERMON V. III

to be his first hour of wisdom :——
*When he came to himself, he said, How
 many hired servants of my father have
 bread enough and to spare, whilst I
 perish !——*

Of all the terrors of nature, that
 of one day or another dying by hun-
 ger, is the greatest, and it is wisely
 wove into our frame to awaken man
 to industry, and call forth his talents ;
 and though we seem to go on care-
 lessly, sporting with it as we do with
 other terrors,——yet, he that sees this
 enemy fairly, and in his most frightful
 shape, will need no long remonstrance
 to make him turn out of the way to
 avoid him.

It was the case of the prodigal——
 he arose to go to his father.——

——Alas ! How shall he tell his story ? Ye who have trod this round, tell me in what words he shall give in to his father, the sad *Items* of his extravagance and folly ?

——The feasts and banquets which he gave to whole cities in the east,—the costs of Asiatick rarities,—and of Asiatick cooks to dress them,—the expences of singing men and singing women,—the flute, the harp, the sackbut, and of all kinds of musick—the dress of the Persian courts, how magnificent ! their slaves how numerous !—their chariots, their horses, their palaces, their furniture, what immense sums they had devoured !—what expectations from

strangers of condition! what exactions!

How shall the youth make his father comprehend, that he was cheated at Damascus by one of the best men in the world;—that he had lent a part of his substance to a friend at Nineveh, who had fled off with it to the Ganges;—that a whore of Babylon had swallowed his best pearl, and anointed the whole city with his balm of Gilead;—that he had been sold by a man of honour for twenty shekels of silver, to a worker in graven images;—that the images he had purchased had profited him nothing;—that they could not be transported across the wilderness, and had been burnt with fire at Shufan;—that the * apes and pea-

* Vide 2 Chronicles ix. 21.

cocks, which he had sent for from Tharfis, lay dead upon his hands; and that the mummies had not been dead long enough, which had been brought him out of Egypt:—that all had gone wrong since the day he forsook his father's house.

—Leave the story,—it will be told more concisely.—*When he was yet afar off, his father saw him,—Compassion told it in three words—be fell upon his neck and kissed him.*

Great is the power of eloquence; but never is it so great as when it pleads along with nature, and the culprit is a child strayed from his duty, and returned to it again with tears: Casuists may settle the point as they will: But what could a parent see

more in the account, than the natural one, of an ingenuous heart too open for the world,—smitten with strong sensations of pleasures, and suffered to sally forth unarm'd into the midst of enemies stronger than himself?

Generosity sorrows as much for the overmatched, as Pity herself does.

The idea of a son so ruin'd, would double the father's caresses: every effusion of his tenderness would add bitterness to his son's remorse.——

“Gracious Heaven! what a father have I rendered miserable!”

And he said, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

But the father said, bring forth the best robe.——

O ye affections! How fondly do you play at cross-purposes with each other!——'Tis the natural dialogue of true transport: joy is not methodical; and where an offender, beloved, overcharges itself in the offence,—— words are too cold; and a conciliated heart replies by tokens of esteem.

And he said unto his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf; and let us eat and drink and be merry.

When the affections so kindly break loose, Joy is another name for Religion.

We look up as we taste it: the cold Stoick without, when he hears the dancing and the musick, may ask

sullenly, (with the elder brother)
 What it means? and refuse to enter :
 but the humane and compassionate all
 fly impetuously to the banquet, given
*for a son who was dead and is alive
 again—who was lost and is found.*
 Gentle spirits light up the pavilion
 with a sacred fire ; and parental love
 and filial piety lead in the mask with
 riot and wild festivity!—Was it
 not for this that God gave man mu-
 sicks to strike upon the kindly pas-
 sions; that nature taught the feet to
 dance to its movements, and as chief
 governess of the feast, poured forth
 wine into the goblet, to crown it with
 gladness?

The intention of this parable is so
 clear from the occasion of it, that it

will not be necessary to perplex it with any tedious explanation: it was designed by way of indirect remonstrance to the Scribes and Pharisees, who animadverted upon our SAVIOUR's conduct, for entering so freely into conferences with sinners, in order to reclaim them. To that end, he proposes the parable of the shepherd, who left his ninety and nine sheep that were safe in the fold, to go and seek for one sheep that was gone astray,—telling them in other places, that they who were whole wanted not a physician,—but they that were sick: and here, to carry on the same lesson, and to prove how acceptable such a recovery was to GOD, he relates this account of the prodi-

SERMON V. 119

gal son and his welcome reception.

I know not whether it would be a subject of much edification to convince you here, that our SAVIOUR, by the prodigal son, particularly pointed at those who were *sinners of the Gentiles*, and were recovered by divine Grace to repentance; — and that by the elder brother, he intended as manifestly the more froward of the Jews, who envied their conversion, and thought it a kind of wrong to their primogeniture, in being made fellow-heirs with them of the promises of God.

These uses have been so ably set forth, in so many good sermons upon the prodigal son, that I shall turn aside from them at present, and content

myself with some reflections upon that fatal passion which led him,——and so many thousands after the example, *to gather all be bad together, and take his journey into a far country.*

The love of variety, or curiosity of seeing new things, which is the same, or at least a sister passion to it,——seems wove into the frame of every son and daughter of Adam; we usually speak of it as one of nature's levities, tho' planted within us for the solid purposes of carrying forwards the mind to fresh inquiry and knowledge: strip us of it, the mind, (I fear) would doze for ever over the present page; and we should all of us rest as ease with such objects at presented themselves in the parish or

province where we first drew our breath.

It is to this spur which is ever in our sides, that we owe the impatience of this desire for travelling: the passion is no way bad,——but as others are,——in its mismanagement or excess;——order it rightly, the advantages are worth the pursuit; the chief of which are——to learn the languages, the laws and customs, and understand the government and interest of other nations,——to acquire an urbanity and confidence of behaviour, and fit the mind more easily for conversation and discourse ——to take us out of the company of our aunts and grandmothers, and from the track of nursery mistakes;

and by shewing us new objects, or old ones in new lights, to reform our judgments——by tasting perpetually the varieties of nature, to know what *is good*——by observing the address and arts of men, to conceive what *is sincere*,——and by seeing the difference of so many various humours and manners,——to look into ourselves and form our own.

This is some part of the cargo we might return with; but the impulse of seeing new sights, augmented with that of getting clear from all lessons both of wisdom and reproof at home——carries our youth too early out, to turn this venture to much account, on the contrary, if the scene painted of the prodigal in his travels, looks

SERMON V. 123

more like a copy than an original,—
will it not be well if such an adventurer, with so unpromising a setting out,—without *carte*,—without compass,——be not cast away for ever,—and may he not be said to escape well——if he returns to his country, only as naked as he first left it?

But you will send an able pilot with your son——a scholar.——

If wisdom can speak in no other language but Greek or Latin,——you do well——or if mathematicks will make a man a gentleman,——or natural philosophy but teach him to make a bow,——he may be of some service in introducing your son into good societies, and supporting him in them when he has done——but the

upshot will be generally this, that in the most pressing occasions of address——if he is a mere man of reading, the unhappy youth will have the tutor to carry,—and not the tutor to carry him.

But you will avoid this extreme; he shall be escorted by one who knows the world, not merely from books—but from his own experience:——a man who has been employed on such services, and thrice made the *tour of Europe, with success.*

——That is, without breaking his own, or his pupil's neck;——for if he is such as my eyes have seen! some broken *Swiss valet de chambre*,—some general undertaker, who will perform the journey in so many months

“ IF GOD PERMIT,”—much knowledge will not accrue;—some profit at least,—he will learn the amount to a halfpenny, of every stage from Calais to Rome;—he will be carried to the best inns,—instructed where there is the best wine, and sup a livre cheaper, than if the youth had been left to make the tour and the bargain himself.—Look at our governor! I beseech you:—see, he is an inch taller, as he relates the advantages.—

—And here endeth his pride—his knowledge, and his use.

But when your son gets abroad, he will be taken out of his hand, by his society with men of rank and letters,

with whom he will pass the greatest part of his time.

Let me observe, in the first place, —that company which is really good, is very rare, —and very shy: but you have surmounted this difficulty; and procured him the best letters of recommendation to the most eminent and respectable in every capital. —

And I answer, that he will obtain all by them, which courtesy strictly stands obliged to pay on such occasions, —but no more.

There is nothing in which we are so much deceived, as in the advantages proposed from our connexions and discourse with the literati, &c. in foreign parts; especially if the expe-

riment is made before we are matured by years or study.

Conversation is a traffick; and if you enter into it, without some stock of knowledge, to balance the account perpetually betwixt you,—the trade drops at once: and this is the reason,——however it may be boasted to the contrary, why travellers have so little (especially good) conversation with natives,——owing to their suspicion,—or perhaps conviction, that there is nothing to be extracted from the conversation of young itinerants, worth the trouble of their bad language,—or the interruption of their visits.

The pain on these occasions is usually reciprocal; the consequence of

which is, that the disappointed youth seeks an easier society; and as bad company is always ready,—and ever lying in wait,—the career is soon finished; and the poor prodigal returns the same object of pity, with the prodigal in the gospel.

SER-

SERMON VI.

National Mercies considered.

[On the Inauguration of his present Majesty.]

DEUTERONOMY VI. 20, 21.

And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

THESE are the words which Moses left as a standing answer for the children of Israel to give their posterity, who in time to come

might become ignorant, or unmindful of the many and great mercies, which God had vouchsafed to their forefathers: all which had terminated in that one of their deliverance out of bondage.

Though they were directed to speak in this manner, each man to his son, yet one cannot suppose, that the direction should be necessary for the next generation,—for the children of those who had been eye-witnesses of God's Providences: it does not seem likely that any of them should arrive to that age of reasoning, which would put them upon asking the supposed question, and not be, long before-hand, instructed in the answer. Every parent would tell his child the hardships

SERMON VI 131

of his captivity, and the amazing particulars of his deliverance: the story was so uncommon,——so full of wonder,——and withal, the recital of it would ever be a matter of such transport, it could not possibly be kept a secret:——the piety and gratitude of one generation, would anticipate the curiosity of another;—their sons would learn the story with their language.

This probably might be the case with the first or second race of people, but in process of time, things might take a different turn: a long and undisturbed possession of their liberties, might blunt the sense of those providences of God, which had procured them, and set the remembrance of all his mercies at too great a distance

from their hearts. After they had for some years been eased of every real burden, an excess of freedom might make them restless under every imaginary one, and amongst others that of their religion; from thence they might seek occasion to inquire into the foundation and fitness of its ceremonies, its statutes, and its judgments.

They might ask, What meant so many commands in matters which to them appeared indifferent in their own natures? What policy in ordaining them? and, What obligation could there lay upon reasonable creatures, to comply with a multitude of such unaccountable injunctions, so unworthy the wisdom of God?

SERMON VI. 133

Hereafter, possibly, they might go further lengths; and though their natural bent was generally towards superstition, yet some adventurers, as is ever the case, might steer for the opposite coast, and as they advanced might discover that all religions, of what denominations or complexions soever, were alike. That the Religion of their own country in particular, was a contrivance of the Priests and Levites,—a phantom dressed out in a terrifying garb of their own making, to keep weak minds in fear:—that its rites and ceremonies, and numberless injunctions, were so many different wheels in the same political engine, put in, no doubt, to amuse the ignorant, and keep them in such a

state of darkness, as clerical juggling requires.

That as for the moral part of it, though it was unexceptionable in itself, ——yet it was a piece of intelligence they did not stand in want of; men had natural reason always to have found it out, ——and wisdom to have practised it, without Moses's assistance.

Nay, possibly, in process of time, they might arrive at greater improvements in religious controversy——when they had given their system of infidelity all the strength it could admit of from reason, they might begin to embellish it with some more sprightly conceits and turns of ridicule.

Some wanton Israelite, when he had eaten and was full, might give free scope and indulgence to this talent: as arguments and sober reasoning fail'd, he might turn the edge of his wit against types and symbols, and treat all the mysteries of his religion, and every thing that could be said upon so serious a subject, with raillery and mirth: he might give vent to a world of pleasantry upon many sacred passages of his law: he might banter the golden calf, or the brazen serpent, with great courage,——and confound himself in the distinctions of clean and unclean beasts, by the desperate sallies of his wit against them.

He could but possibly take one step further: when the land which flowed

with milk and honey, had quite worn out the impressions of his yoke, and blessings began to multiply upon his hands, he might draw this curious conclusion, that there was no Being who was the author and bestower of them,——but that it was their own arm, and the mightiness of Israelitish strength, which had put them, and kept them, in possession of so much happiness.——

O Moses! How would thy meek and patient spirit have been put to the torture by such a return? If a propensity towards superstition in the Israelites, did once betray thee into an excess of anger, that thou threwest the two tables out of thy hands, which God had wrote, and carelessly hazarded'st

the whole treasure of the world,——
 with what indignation and honest angu-
 ish wouldst thou have heard the
 scoffings of those who denied the hand
 which brought them forth, and said,
 Who is God, that we should obey his
 voice? With what force and vivacity
 wouldst thou have reproached them
 with the history of their own nation :
 ——that if too free an enjoyment of
 God's blessings, had made them for-
 get to look backwards,——it was ne-
 cessary to remind them, that their fore-
 fathers were Pharaoh's bondsmen in E-
 gypt, without prospect of deliverance ;
 that the chains of their captivity had
 been fixed and rivetted by a succession
 of four hundred and thirty years,
 without the interruption of one strug-

gle for their liberty : that after the expiration of that hopeless period, when no natural means favoured the event, they were snatched, almost against their own wills, out of the hands of their oppressors, and led through an ocean of dangers, to the possession of a land of plenty : that this change in their affairs was not the produce of chance or fortune,—or was it projected or executed by any atchievement or plan of human device, which might soon again be defeated by superior strength or policy from without, or from force of accidents from within, from change of circumstances, humours, and passions of men, all which generally had a sway in the rise and fall of kingdoms,

—but that all was brought about by the power and goodness of God, who saw and pitied the afflictions of a distressed people, and by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, set them free from the yoke of oppression.

That since that miraculous escape, a series of successes not to be accounted for by second causes, and the natural course of events, had demonstrated not only God's providence in general, but his particular providence and attachment to them—that nations greater and mightier than they, were driven out before them, and their lands given to them for an everlasting possession.—

This was what they should teach their children, and their children's children after them.—Happy generations, for whom so joyful a lesson was prepared! happy indeed! had ye at all times known to have made the use of it, which Moses continually exhorted,—*of drawing nigh unto God with all your hearts, who had been so nigh unto you.*

And here let us drop the argument, as it respects the Jews, and for a moment turn it towards ourselves: the present occasion, and the recollection which is natural upon it, of the many other parts of this complicated blessing vouchsafed to us, since we became a nation, making it hard to desist from such an application.

S E R M O N VI. 141

I begin with the first in order of time, as well as the greatest of national deliverances,—our deliverance from darkness and idolatry, by the conveyance of the light which Christianity brought with it into Britain, so early as in the life-time of the apostles themselves,—or at furthest, not many years after their death.

Though this might seem a blessing conveyed and offered to us in common with other parts of the world, yet when you reflect upon this as a remote corner of the earth in respect of Judea,—its situation and inaccessibility as an island,—the little that was then known of navigation,—or carried on of commerce,—the large tract of land which to this day re-

mains unhallowed with the name of CHRIST, and almost in the neighbourhood of where the first glad tidings of him were founded—One cannot but adore the goodness of God, and remark a more particular providence in its conveyance and establishment here, than amongst other nations upon the continent,——where, though the oppositions from error and prejudice were equal, it had not these natural impediments to encounter.

Historians and statesmen, who generally search every where for the causes of events, but in the pleasure of Him who disposes of them, may make different reflections upon this. They may consider it as a matter incidental, brought to pass by the for-

tuitous ambition, success and settlement of the Romans here; it appearing, that in Claudius's reign, when Christianity began to get footing in Rome, that near eighty thousand of that city and people were fixed in this island: as this made a free communication betwixt the two places, the way for the gospel was in course open, and its transition from the one to the other, natural and easy to be accounted for,——and yet, nevertheless, providential. God often suffers us to pursue the devices of our hearts, whilst he turns the course of them, like the rivers of waters, to bountiful purposes. Thus, he might make that pursuit of glory inherent in the Romans, the engine to advance his own,

and establish it here: he might make the wickedness of the earth to work his own righteousness, by suffering them to wander a while beyond their proper bounds, till his purposes were fulfilled, and *then put his book into their nostrils*, and lead those wild beasts of prey back again into their own land.

Next to this blessing of the light of the gospel, we must not forget that by which it was preserved from the danger of being totally smothered and extinguished, by that vast swarm of barbarous nations, which came down upon us from the north, and shook the world like a tempest; changing names and customs, and language and government, and almost the very face of nature, wherever they fixed. That

our religion should be preserved at all, when every thing else seemed to perish, which was capable of change,—or, that it should not be hurt under that mighty weight of ruins, beyond the recovery of its former beauty and strength,—the whole can be ascribed to no cause so likely as this, That the same power of God which sent it forth, was present to support it —when the whole frame of other things gave way.

Next in degree to this mercy of preserving Christianity from an utter extinction—we must reckon that of being enabled to preserve, and free it from corruptions, which the rust of time,—the abuses of men, and the natural tendency of all things to de-

generacy, which are trusted to them, had from time to time introduced into it.

Since the day in which this reformation was began, by how many strange and critical turns has it been perfected and handed down, if not *entirely without spot or wrinkle*,—at least, without great blotches or marks of anility.

Even the blow which was suffered to fall upon it shortly after, in that period where our history looks so unlike herself, stain'd, Mary, by thee, and disfigured with blood:—can one reflect upon it, without adoring the Providence of God, which so speedily snatched the sword of persecution out of her hand,—making her reign as short as it was merciless.

If God then made us, as he did the Israelites, suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, how much more signal was his mercy in giving them to us without money, without price, in those good days which followed, when a long and a wise reign was as necessary to build up our church, as a short one was before to save it from ruins.——

——The blessing was necessary,—and it was granted.——

——God having multiplied the years of that renowned princess to an uncommon number, giving her time, as well as a heart, to fix a wavering persecuted people, and settle them upon such foundation as must make them happy;——the touchstone, by which

they are to be tried, whom God has entrusted with the care of kingdoms.

Blessed be thy glorious name for ever and ever, in making that test so much easier for the British, than other princes of this earth; whose subjects, whatever other changes they have felt, have seldom happened upon that of changing their misery, and, it is to be feared, are never likely, so long as they are kept so strongly bound in chains of darkness,—and chains of power.

From both these kinds of evils, which are almost naturally connected together, How providential was our escape in the succeeding reign, when all the choice blood was bespoke, and preparations made to offer it up at one sacrifice.

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I would not intermix the horrors of that black-projected festival, with the glories of this: or name the sorrows of the next reign, which ended in the subversion of our constitution, was it not necessary to pursue the thread of our deliverances through those times, and remark how nigh God's Providence was to us in them both, by protecting us from the one, in as signal a manner as he restored us from the other.

Indeed the latter of them might have been a joyless matter of remembrance to us at this day, had it not been confirmed a blessing by a succeeding escape, which sealed and conveyed it safe down to us: whether it was to correct an undue sense of for-

mer blessings,—or to teach us to reflect upon the number and value of them, by threatening us with the deprivation of them,—we were suffered, however to approach the edge of a precipice, where, if God had not raised up a deliverer to lead us back, —all had been lost:—the arts of Jesuitry had decoyed us forwards, or if that had failed, we had been push'd down by open force, and our destruction had been inevitable.

The good consequences of that deliverance are such, that it seemed as if God had suffered our waters, like those of Bethesda, to be troubled, to make them afterwards more healing to us, since to the account of that day's blessing, we charge the enjoyment of

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every thing since, worth a free man's living for,—the revival of our liberty, our religion; the just rights of our kings,—and the just rights of our people,—and along with all, that happy provision for their continuance, for which we are returning thanks to God this day.

Let us do it, I beseech you, in the way which becomes wise men, by pursuing the intentions of his blessings, and making a better use of them than our forefathers, who sometimes seem'd to grow weary of their own happiness:—let us rather thank God for the good land which he has given us; and when we begin to prosper in it, and have built goodly houses, and

dwelt therein,——and when our silver and our gold is multiplied, and all that we have is multiplied, let the instances of our virtue and benevolence be multiplied with them, that the great and mighty God, who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, may, in the last day of accounting with us, judge us worthy of the mercies we have received.

In vain are days set apart to celebrate successful occurrences, unless they influence a nation's morals:——a sinful people can never be grateful to God,——nor can they, properly speaking, be loyal to their prince;——they cannot be grateful to the one,——because they live not under a sense of

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his mercies,——nor can they be loyal to the other, because they disengage the Providence of God from taking his part,——and then giving a heart to his adversaries to be intractable.—

And therefore, what was said by some one, That every sin was a treason against the soul, may be applied here,——That every wicked man is a traitor to his king and his country. And, whatever statesmen may write of the causes of the rise and fall of nations;—for the contrary reasons, a good man will ever be found to be the best patriot and the best subject: and though an individual may say, What can my righteousness profit a nation of men? it may be answered, That if it should fail of a blessing here,——

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it will have one advantage at least,
which is this,

It will save thy own soul; which
may God grant. Amen.

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The History of JACOB considered.

GENESIS xlvii. 9.

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.——

THERE is not a man in history, whom I pity more than the man who made this reply,——not because his days were short,——but that they were long enough to have crowded into them, so much evil as we find.

Of all the patriarchs, he was the most unhappy: for, 'bating the seven

years he served Laban for Rachael,
“ *which seemed to him but a few days,
for the love he had to her,*”——strike
those out of the number,——all his
other days were sorrow; and that,
not from his faults, but from the am-
bition, the violences, and evil passions
of others. A large portion of what
man is born to, comes, you’ll say,
from the same quarter: ’tis true; but
still, in some men’s lives, there seems
a contexture of misery;——one evil
so rises out of another, and the whole
plan and execution of the piece has
so very melancholy an air, that a good-
natured man shall not be able to look
upon it, but with tears on his cheeks.

I pity this patriarch still the more,
because, from his first setting out in

life, he had been led into an expectation of such different scenes: he was told, by Isaac his father, that *God should bless him with the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and with plenty of corn and wine;—that people were to serve him, and nations to bow down to him;—that he should be lord over his brethren;—that blessed was every one that blessed him, and cursed was every one who cursed him.*

The simplicity of youth takes promises of happiness in the fullest latitude, —and as these were moreover confirmed to him by the God of his fathers, on his way to Padan-aran, —it would leave no distrust of their accomplishment upon his mind; —every fair and flattering object before

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him, which wore the face of joy, he would regard as a portion of his blessing;—he would pursue it,—he would grasp a shadow.

This, by the way, makes it necessary to suppose, that the blessings which were conveyed, had a view to blessings not altogether such as a carnal mind would expect; but that they were in a great measure spiritual, and such as the prophetic soul of Isaac had principally before him, in the comprehensive idea of their future and happy establishment, when they were no longer to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth: for in fact, in the strict and literal sense of his father's grant,—Jacob enjoyed it not; and was so far from being a happy man,

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that in the most interesting passages of his life, he met with nothing but disappointments and grievous afflictions.

Let us accompany him from the first treacherous hour of a mother's ambition; in consequence of which, he is driven forth from his country, and the protection of his house, to seek protection and an establishment in the house of Laban his kinsman.

In what manner this answered his expectations, we find from his own pathetick remonstrance to Laban, when he had pursued him seven days journey, and overtook him on mount Gilead.—I see him in the door of the tent, with the calm courage which

innocence gives the oppressed, thus remonstrating to his father-in-law upon the cruelty of his treatment.

These twenty years that I have been with thee,——thy ewes have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock, have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts, I brought not unto thee, ——I have the loss of it; what was stolen by day, or stolen by night, of my hands didst thou require it. Thus I was: in the day the draught consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house:——I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

Scarce had he recovered from these evils, when the ill conduct and vices of his children wound his soul to death.—Reuben proves incestuous, —Judah adulterous,—his daughter Dinah is dishonoured,—Simeon and Levi dishonour themselves by treachery,—two of his grandchildren are stricken with sudden death,—Rachael his beloved wife perishes, and in circumstances which embitter'd his loss, —his son Joseph, a most promising youth, is torn from him, by the envy of his brethren; and, to close all, himself driven by famine in his old age to die amongst the Egyptians, a people who held it an abomination to eat bread with him. Unhappy patriarch; well might he say, *That*

few and evil had been his days: the answer, indeed, was extended beyond the monarch's inquiry, which was simply his age;—but how could he look back upon the days of his pilgrimage, without thinking of the sorrows which those days had brought along with them? all that was more in the answer than in the demand, was the overflowings of a heart ready to bleed afresh at the recollection of what had befallen.

Unwillingly does the mind digest the evils prepared for it by others;—for those we prepare ourselves,—we eat but the fruit which we have planted and watered:—a shattered fortune—
a shattered frame, so we have but the satisfaction of shattering them our-

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selves, pass naturally enough into the habit, and by the ease with which they are both done, they save the spectator a world of pity : but for those like Jacob's, brought upon him by the hands from which he looked for all his comforts,——the avarice of a parent,——the unkindness of a relation,——the ingratitude of a child,——they are evils which leave a scar;——besides, as they hang over the heads of all, and therefore may fall upon any;——every looker-on has an interest in the tragedy;——but then we are apt to interest ourselves no otherwise, than merely as the incidents themselves strike our passions, without carrying the lesson further:——in a word—we realize nothing:——

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we sigh—we wipe away the tear,—
and there ends the story of misery,
and the moral with it.

Let us try to do better with this.
To begin, with the bad bias which
gave the whole turn to the patriarch's
life,——parental partiality——or pa-
rental injustice,——it matters not by
what title it stands distinguished——
'tis that, by which Rebekah planted
a dagger in Esau's breast; and an
eternal terror with it, in her own, lest
she should live to be deprived of them,
both in one day,——and trust me,
dear Christians, wherever that equal
balance of kindness and love, which
children look up to you for as their
natural right, is no longer maintained
——there will daggers ever be planted;

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the son shall literally be set at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,—and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

It was an excellent ordinance, as well of domestic policy, as of equity, which Moses gave upon this head, in the 21st of Deuteronomy.

If a man have two wives, one beloved and one hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the first born son be hers that was hated, then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved, first born, before the son of the hated which is indeed the first born,—

but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for first born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath. The evil was well fenced against——for 'tis one of those which steals in upon the heart with the affections, and courts the parent under so sweet a form, that thousands have been betrayed by the very virtues which should have preserved them. Nature tells the parent, there can be no error on the side of affection;——but we forget, when Nature pleads for one, she pleads for every child alike,——and, Why is not her voice to be heard? Solomon says, Oppression will make a wise man mad.——What will it do then to a tender and ingenuous heart, which feels itself neglected,——too full of reve-

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rence for the author of its wrongs to complain?—see, it sits down in silence, robbed by discouragements, of all its natural powers to please,—born to see others loaded with caresses——in some uncheary corner it nourishes its discontent,——and with a weight upon its spirits, which its little stock of fortitude is not able to withstand,——it droops, and pines away.——Sad Victim of Caprice!

We are unavoidably led here into a reflection upon Jacob's conduct in regard to his son Joseph, which no way corresponded with the lesson of wisdom, which the miseries of his own family might have taught him: surely his eyes had seen sorrow sufficient on that score, to have taken warning:

and yet we find, that he fell into the same snare of partiality to that child in his old age, which his mother Rebekah had shewn to him, in hers,——*for Israel loved Joseph more than all his children; because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colours.*——O Israel! where was that prophetic spirit which darted itself into future times, and told each tribe what was to be its fate?——Where was it fled, that it could not aid thee to look so little a way forwards, as to behold *this coat of many colours*, stained with blood? Why were the tender emotions of a parent's anguish hid from thy eyes?——and, Why is every thing?——but that it pleases heaven to give us no more light in our way,

than will leave virtue in possession of its recompence,——

——Grant me, gracious God! to go cheerfully on, the road which thou hast marked out;——I wish it neither more wide or more smooth:——continue the light of this dim taper thou hast put into my hands:——I will kneel upon the ground seven times a day, to seek the best track I can with it——and having done that, I will trust myself and the issue of my journey to thee, who art the fountain of joy,——and will sing songs of comfort as I go along.

Let us proceed to the second great occurrence in the patriarch's life.——The imposition of a wife upon him, which he neither bargain'd for or

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loved.—*And it came to pass in the morning, behold it was Leah! and he said unto Laban, What is this that thou hast done unto me? Did I not serve thee for Rachael? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me!*

This indeed is out of the system of all conjugal impositions now,——but the moral of it is still good; and the abuse with the same complaint of Jacob's upon it, will ever be repeated, so long as art and artifice are so busy as they are in these affairs.

Listen, I pray you, to the stories of the disappointed in marriage:——collect all their complaints:——hear their mutual reproaches; upon what fatal hinge do the greatest part of them turn?——“ They were mistaken

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in the person."—Some disguise either of body or mind is seen through in the first domestic scuffle;—some fair ornament—perhaps the very one which won the heart—*the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*, falls off;—*It is not the Rachael for whom I have served,*—*Why hast thou then beguiled me?*

Be open—be honest: give yourself for what you are; conceal nothing—varnish nothing,—and if these fair weapons will not do,—better not conquer at all, than conquer for a day:—when the night is passed, 'twill ever be the same story,—*And it came to pass, behold it was Leah!*

If the heart beguiles itself in its choice, and imagination will give ex-

cellencies which are not the portion of flesh and blood:—when the dream is over, and we awake in the morning, it matters little whether 'tis Rachael or Leah,—be the object what it will, as it must be on the earthly side, at least, of perfection,—it will fall short of the work of fancy, whose existence is in the clouds.

In such cases of deception, let not man exclaim as Jacob does in his,—*What is it thou hast done unto me?*—for 'tis his own doings, and he has nothing to lay his fault on, but the heat and poetick indiscretion of his own passions.

I know not whether 'tis of any use to take notice of this singularity in the patriarch's life, in regard to the wrong

he received from Laban, which was the very wrong he had done before to his father Isaac, when the infirmities of old age had disabled him from distinguishing one child from another: *Art thou my very son Esau? and he said, I am.* 'Tis doubtful whether Leah's veracity was put to the same test,—but both suffered from a similitude of stratagem; and 'tis hard to say, whether the anguish, from cross'd love, in the breast of one brother, might not be as sore a punishment, as the disquietudes of cross'd ambition and revenge, in the breast of the other.

I do not see which way the honour of Providence is concerned in repaying us exactly in our own coin,—

or, why a man should fall into that very pit, (and no other) which he has *graven and digged for another man*: time and chance may bring such incidents about, and there wants nothing, but that Jacob should have been a bad man, to have made this a common-place text for such a doctrine.

It is enough for us, that the best way to escape evil, is, in general, not to commit it ourselves——and that whenever the passions of mankind will order it otherwise, to rob those, at least, *who love judgments*, of the triumph of finding it out,——*That our travail has returned upon our heads, and our violent dealings upon our own pates.*

I cannot conclude this discourse, without returning first to the part

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with which it set out;——the patriarch's account to the king of Egypt, of the shortness and misery of his days: ——give me leave to bring this home to us, by a single reflection upon each.

There is something strange in it that life should appear so short *in the gross*——and yet so long *in the detail*. Misery may make it so, you'll say——but we will exclude it,——and still you'll find, though we all complain of the shortness of life, what numbers there are who seem quite overstocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually sending out into the highways and streets of the city, to compel guests to come in, and take it off their hands: to do this with ingenuity and

forecast, is not one of the least arts and business of life itself; and they who cannot succeed in it, carry as many marks of distress about them, as bankruptcy herself could wear. Be as careless as we may, we shall not always have the power,——nor shall we always be in a temper to let the account run thus. When the blood is cool'd, and the spirits, which have hurried us on through half our days, before we have numbered one of them, are beginning to retire;——then wisdom will press a moment to be heard,——afflictions or a bed of sickness will find their hours of persuasion——and, should they fail,——there is something yet behind,——old age will overtake us at the last, and with its

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trembling hand hold up the glass to us, as it did unto the patriarch.—

—Dear inconsiderate Christians! wait not, I beseech you, till then;— take a view of your life now;— look back, behold this fair space capable of such heavenly improvements— all scrawl'd over and defaced with—
— I want words to say, with what— for I think only of the reflections with which you are to support yourselves, in the decline of a life so miserably cast away, should it happen, as it often does, that ye have stood idle unto the eleventh hour, and have all the work of the day to perform when night comes on, and no one can work.

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zelly. As to the evil of the days of the years of our pilgrimage——speculation and fact appear at variance again.——We agree with the patriarch, that the life of man is miserable; and yet the world looks happy enough——and every thing tolerably at its ease. It must be noted indeed, that the patriarch, in this account, speaks merely his present feelings, and seems rather to be giving a history of his sufferings, than a system of them, in contradiction to that of the God of Love. Look upon the world he has given us,——observe the riches and plenty which flows in every channel, not only to satisfy the desires of the temperate,——but of the fanciful and wanton——every place is almost a

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paradise, planted when nature was in her gayest humour,

—Every thing has two views. Jacob, and Job, and Solomon, gave one section of the globe,——and this representation another:——truth lieth betwixt—or rather, good and evil are mixed up together; which of the two preponderates, is beyond our inquiry; ——but, I trust—it is the good:——first, As it renders the Creator of the world more dear and venerable to me; and, secondly, Because I will not suppose, that a work intended to exalt his glory, should stand in want of apologies.

Whatever is the proportion of misery in this world, it is certain, that it can be no duty of religion to increase

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the complaint,——or to affect the praise which the Jesuits' college of Granado gave of their *Sanchez*,——That tho' he lived where there was a very sweet garden, yet was never seen to touch a flower; and that he would rather die than eat salt or pepper, or aught that might give a relish to his meat.

I pity the men whose natural pleasures are burdens, and who fly from joy, (as these splenetic and morose souls do) as if it was really an evil in itself.

If there is an evil in this world, 'tis sorrow and heaviness of heart.——The loss of goods,——of health,——of coronets and mitres, are only evil, as they occasion sorrow;——take that

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out—the rest is fancy, and dwelleth only in the head of man.

Poor unfortunate creature that he is! as if the causes of anguish in the heart were not enow—but he must fill up the measure with those of caprice; and not only walk in a vain shadow,—but disquiet himself in vain too.

We are a restless set of beings; and as we are likely to continue so to the end of the world,—the best we can do in it, is to make the same use of this part of our character, which wise men do of other bad propensities—when they find they cannot conquer them,—they endeavour, at least, to divert them into good channels.

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If therefore we must be a solicitous
race of self-tormentors,—let us drop
the common objects which make us
so,—and for God's sake be solicitous
only to live well.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.



